

Christopher  
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To Karl Brooks, Mark Hague, Cecilia Tapia, Rich Hood, DeAndre  
Singletary, Dan Gravatt, Audrey Asher, Debbie Kring, Hattie  
Thomas, Ben Washburn, Karim Dawani, David Bryan, Ben  
Washburn

cc

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Subject KSDK Channel 5's Friday 2/1 Story on West Lake Landfill

<http://www.ksdk.com/news/article/358531/70/Homeowners-lose-faith-with-EPA-over-landfill>

(Link includes video.)

# Homeowners lose faith with EPA over West Lake Landfill

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Credit: AP/file.

By [Leisa Zigman](#) I-Team Reporter

**ST. LOUIS COUNTY (KSDK)** - The majority of St. Louisans who get their water from the Missouri River have most likely never heard of the West Lake Landfill, but they should.

Since 1973, 8,000 tons of nuclear waste has been decaying at this landfill with no protective liner to separate it from ground water.

To understand the depths of concern, just look at the faces of those who wanted EPA officials to hear them.

"I am sicker than a dog," said one resident who lives near the landfill.

Karen Nickel, who battles lupus, believes she too is sick because of the [nuclear waste dumped](#) at the West Lake Landfill nearly 40 year ago.

"West Lake especially is a ticking time bomb right now," said Nickel.

The origins of the waste date back to the Manhattan Project and the creation of the first atomic weapon. Enormous amounts of uranium were purified at Mallinckrodt Chemical Works in downtown St. Louis.

The process generated piles of nuclear waste that the government sent to disposal sites near the airport. In the 70s, about 8,000 tons of uranium, thorium, and radium were dumped at West Lake.

"This stuff has been sitting unprotected, not covered, no liner, and no barrier," said Nickel.

West Lake sits on a flood plain. That is why so many people who live and work near the landfill say everyone in the region should be concerned.

Nickel explained, "300,000 people get their water from the intake at the Missouri River, eight miles from here and it flows in that direction."

"It's wet, high groundwater table, people nearby. It's really stupid. It's a stupid place for it," said

Bob Criss, a geo chemist at Washington University.

He said few things are as absurd as burying this waste in a substandard landfill, in a floodplain, in an urban area.

In 2008, the EPA recommended putting a cap on the landfill and covering the nuclear waste with clay, rocks and dirt. The problem according to Criss is that this stuff gets more radioactive over time and stays toxic for billions of years. There was such public outrage in 2008, the EPA decided to conduct more studies.

The latest tests, made public two weeks ago, show 25 wells are contaminated with high levels of radium.

"People are not drinking the water that has the low levels of radium at this time. What about air, what about breathing it in? The radon comes out of the ground everywhere. It is naturally occurring. It does come out of the ground a little bit more from this landfill, but it dissipates pretty quickly," said Dan Gravatt, EPA project manager.

Those at the information meeting two weeks ago were not comforted by what the EPA had to say especially because those water samples were taken this summer, during the drought. And, the government paid the companies responsible for cleaning up the mess, to conduct the tests.

Nickel and others are frustrated because this has been an ongoing issue for decades.

"I guess just me being a plain old citizen, if you know it's dangerous, chop chop get it done," she said.

The EPA plans on doing more tests before issuing a final decision.

The I-Team asked how much money the EPA spent on testing, studies, and reports over the past two decades. A spokesperson explained there were four parties responsible for the bulk of the expenses, including Bridgeton Landfill, LLC, Cotter Corporation, Rock Road Industries, Inc. and The Department of Energy. Since 1989 the EPA's cost has been \$883,350.84.

**[Click here to watch and read the first part of this investigation.](#)**

Two Facebook pages have been created by citizens dealing with nuclear waste; [one for West Lake Landfill](#) and the other for [Cold Water Creek](#).

If you would like to [contact the EPA](#) or the [Missouri Coalition for the Environment](#), visit their websites.

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